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# Self-esteem and multiculturalism: An examination among ethnic minority and majority groups in the Netherlands

Maykel Verkuyten \*

Faculty of Social Sciences, Utrecht University, Heidelberglaan 2, 3584 CS Utrecht, The Netherlands

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## ABSTRACT

This research tests the self-esteem argument for multiculturalism: the idea that acceptance and recognition of cultural diversity is crucial for personal self-feelings because of its support for ethnic identity. Results from three studies using two different methodologies (correlational and experimental) provide support for this argument among ethnic minority and majority participants living in the Netherlands. The results of the first two studies show that multiculturalism is positively associated to self-esteem among ethnic minority (Studies 1 and 2) and majority group (Study 1) participants who identify strongly with their ethnic group. The third experimental questionnaire study shows that multiculturalism provides a favorable social context for positive self-esteem for both minority and majority group members who identify with and feel committed to their ethnic group. However, it is also a context in which low group identifiers appear to have relatively low self-esteem.

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## 1. Introduction

The idea that social acceptance and recognition of cultural diversity and cultural identity is crucial for personal self-feelings is, according to Burnet (1995), the multiculturalist assumption. The public acceptance and recognition of one's group and culture are, it is argued, valuable as conditions for a positive group identity that sustains personal feelings of self-respect and self-esteem. For example, in his essay 'The politics of recognition', the philosopher Taylor (1994, p. 26) argues that, 'misrecognition shows not just a lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victim with a crippling self-hatred. Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need'. And in his book on 'Rethinking multiculturalism' his British colleague Parekh (2000, p. 8) argues that 'we appreciate better than before that culture deeply matters to people, that their self-esteem depends on others' recognition and respect'.

This self-esteem argument for multiculturalism plays an important role in public and institutional debates. Multicultural acceptance and recognition has been found to be important for psychological well-being and counseling (see Sue & Sue, 2003) and for the educational process (see Banks & Banks, 1995). Developmental research has shown that positive multicultural interactions can result in a secure and strong ethnic identity that has a positive impact on different outcomes (e.g., Seaton, Scottham, & Sellers, 2006; Yip, Seaton, & Sellers, 2006). Further, in acculturation

research there is evidence that the public denial or rejection of one's group and culture facilitates an insecure group identity that undermines feelings of self-worth (see Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006).

The current research focuses on the relationship between multicultural recognition and global self-feelings of ethnic minority and majority group members in the Netherlands. In line with the self-esteem argument it was expected that multicultural recognition will have a positive influence on global self-feelings, particularly among high group identifiers. This expected interaction effect was examined in three studies, including an experimental one.

## 2. Multicultural recognition and ethnic identity

The self-esteem argument for multiculturalism states that the social acceptance and recognition of cultural identities leads to more positive self-feelings. This view is related to the already considerable research carried out on ethnic identity and self-esteem (see Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000; Twenge & Crocker, 2002, for reviews). Having a strong and positive ethnic identity can contribute to high global self-feelings in different ways. People, for example, strive to achieve or maintain a positive group identity and such an identity may act as an important contingency to base one's global self-esteem upon (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). Group identity can also provide a sense of belongingness and inclusion that enhances positive self-feelings (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Furthermore, anthropologists have argued that ethnicity can provide an answer to the 'perennial problems of life: the question

\* Fax: +31 302534733.

E-mail address: [M.Verkuyten@uu.nl](mailto:M.Verkuyten@uu.nl)

of origins, destiny and, ultimately, the meaning of life' (Cohen, in Eriksen, 1993, p. 45). Hence, ethnic identity can contribute to self-esteem because it provides a meaning system that buffers against existential anxiety (Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997; Martinez & Dukes, 1997).

Further, because group members derive their social identity from membership of social groups, it can be assumed that people prefer their in-group to be socially recognized, accepted and valued. This confers a meaningful and positive social identity on them that they will try to maintain and protect. In contrast, a lack of distinctiveness and a devalued or misrecognized social identity represents an identity threat that is likely to lead to the deployment of a wide range of identity-management strategies (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Thus, there are good reasons as well as strong evidence for a positive association between ethnic identity and self-feelings.

A multicultural perspective provides the social recognition and justification for affirming one's ethnic identity and to value ethnic differentiation positively. Such a perspective is particularly important for individuals that have developed, for example through parental socialization (e.g., Knight, Bernal, Garza, Cota, & Ocampo, 1993; Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, & Allen, 1990), a strong and positive ethnic identity. Such an identity manifests itself in a generalized readiness to be concerned about society's recognition of cultural differences and the value of ethnic groups. In social psychology, there is considerable empirical evidence that in an inter-group situation those with high in-group identification are more likely to be concerned about their in-group relative to those shown by low identifiers (e.g., Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999). This is especially the case when the value of the group identity is at stake. This leads to the expectation that ethnic group identification and multicultural recognition interact in predicting self-esteem. Issues of cultural recognition and ethnic group value are more important for high identifiers than they are for low identifiers who tend to base their global self-feelings upon other, more personal, contingencies than their ethnic group.

### 3. The role of group status

Multiculturalism is found to be favored or endorsed by ethnic minority groups in various countries (e.g., Verkuyten, 2006; Wolko, Park, & Judd, 2006). For them, multicultural recognition offers the possibility of maintaining their own culture and gaining acceptance in society. Because multiculturalism is typically seen as identity supporting for minority groups, I predicted for these groups that multiculturalism would be associated with higher global self-feelings, and particularly if members were highly identified with their ethnic minority group. This prediction was examined among Turkish–Dutch and Moroccan–Dutch participants. These two Muslim groups are among the numerically largest minority groups living in the Netherlands. Originally (late 1960s) they both came to this country as migrant workers. They also possess the lowest social status, differ from most of the Dutch in cultural values and norms (SCP, 2003), and face the highest levels of discrimination and social rejection (see Hagendoorn, 1995).

Predictions for the high status majority group are more difficult to make because these depend on the interpretation given to multiculturalism. Research has found that system-justifying beliefs are positively associated with psychological well-being, including self-esteem, among members of high-status groups (Jost & Thompson, 2000; Quinn & Crocker, 1999), and especially among those who show high group identification (O'Brien & Major, 2005). Multiculturalism can be seen as a hierarchy-attenuating belief (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) and therefore might be associated negatively with self-esteem among high majority group identifiers. However, as long as multiculturalism focuses on ethnic minority groups and

does not threaten the social status of the majority group, majority group members' self-feelings might not be linked to the social acceptance and recognition of cultural diversity. Further, it is possible that a social context stressing multicultural acceptance and recognition of all groups is beneficial for the psychological well-being of majority group members also. In a large scale-study in 182 school classes and by using multi-level analysis, Verkuyten and Thijs (2004), for example, found that multicultural education had a positive effect on self-esteem of both ethnic minority and majority adolescents living in the Netherlands. These different possibilities makes it difficult to formulate a precise expectation for the ethnic Dutch participants. Therefore, for this group the relationship between multicultural recognition and global self-feelings was explored.

Three studies were conducted. The first two studies focus on the endorsement of multicultural recognition whereas the third one uses an experimental questionnaire design to examine the situational effects on global self-feelings of multicultural recognition in comparison to color-blindness in which the emphasis is on people as unique individuals rather than as ethnic group members. Following principles of cultural knowledge and lay theories activation (see Higgins, 1996; Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martínez, 2000; Levy, West, & Ramirez, 2005), the third study tried to show that the activation of the importance of multicultural recognition or of color-blindness has an impact on self-feelings that is consistent with the self-esteem argument for multiculturalism.

## 4. Study 1

### 4.1. Method

#### 4.1.1. Sample

In total, 326 students participated in this study. Of these participants, 186 described themselves as Dutch and 140 as Turkish ( $N = 89$ ) and Moroccan ( $N = 51$ ). There were 174 females and 152 males, and participants were either 15 or 16 years of age (mean age 15.34). All minority group participants were born in the Netherlands or had immigrated to this country before the age of four. There were no gender and age differences between the Dutch and the ethnic minority participants. The data were collected at five schools for secondary education. The students were asked to fill in a short questionnaire on educational attitudes and questions related to social issues and themselves. Participation was voluntary and all students agreed to participate.

#### 4.1.2. Measures

Global self-esteem was assessed by means of the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965) that has been found to have cross-cultural equivalence (Farruggia, Chen, Greenberger, Dmitrieva, & Macek, 2004). Using five-point scales ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly), participants were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed with each of the ten items on the scale. With this sample, Cronbach's alpha was .80 and the alpha was similar for the majority and the minority group participants.

The endorsement of multicultural recognition was measured using two items from the Dutch version of the multicultural ideology scale. The items were: 'In Dutch society, every ethnic group should be able to maintain their culture as much as possible', and 'Every group has a right to its own culture'. The two items were measured on scales ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly).

Ethnic identification was assessed by six items presented immediately after the participants indicated their ethnic group membership on the questionnaire. The items have been used in various Dutch studies (see Verkuyten, 2005) and measure the importance attached to one's ethnic background. The items were

measured on the same seven-point scales and three sample items are 'I feel a strong attachment to my ethnic group', 'I identify with my ethnic group', and 'I have a strong sense of belonging to my ethnic group'. Cronbach's alpha was .83 and a higher score indicates stronger ethnic group identification.

## 4.2. Results

### 4.2.1. Preliminary analysis

In agreement with previous studies (e.g., Verkuyten & Thijs, 2004), preliminary analyses showed that there were no significant differences in self-esteem, ethnic identification and the endorsement of multiculturalism between the Turkish–Dutch and the Moroccan–Dutch participants.

To examine mean differences in ethnic identification and the endorsement of multicultural recognition, these measures served as multiple dependent variables in an analysis of variance with ethnic majority or minority group as a between-subjects factor. The multivariate effect of ethnic group was significant,  $F(3,325) = 92.26$ ,  $p < .001$ . Univariate analysis showed that this effect was significant for both measures ( $ps < .001$ ). Compared to the Dutch group, the minority participants had a significantly higher score for ethnic identification (ethnic minorities,  $M = 3.91$ ,  $SD = .69$ , and the Dutch,  $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = .54$ ), as well as for the endorsement of multiculturalism (ethnic minorities,  $M = 4.24$ ,  $SD = .92$ , and the Dutch,  $M = 3.10$ ,  $SD = .99$ ).

There was a significant positive association between the endorsement of multiculturalism and ethnic identification for the ethnic minority group ( $r = .26$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and a negative association for the Dutch participants ( $r = -.22$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The difference between these two correlations is significant,  $z = 4.25$ ,  $p < .001$ .

### 4.2.2. Self-esteem

Hierarchical regression analysis was used to predict global self-esteem. In the first step, ethnic group (0 = Dutch and 1 = ethnic minorities), the centered scores for ethnic identification, and the endorsement of multiculturalism were entered. In the second step, the two interactions with multiculturalism were entered: ethnic group  $\times$  multiculturalism, and ethnic identification  $\times$  multiculturalism. In Step 3, the three-way interaction between multiculturalism, ethnic group, and identification was entered into the equation. Table 1 shows the results.

The model in the first step explains 9% of the variance in self-esteem. The ethnic minority participants and the Dutch did not differ for self-esteem. Ethnic identification was a significant positive predictor of self-esteem and multiculturalism was not related to self-esteem.

The second step accounted for an additional 3.6% of the variance in self-esteem. There was a significant interaction effect between

ethnic group and multiculturalism. Separate regression analyses for the ethnic minority group and the Dutch showed that for the former group of participants multicultural recognition was positively associated to self-esteem ( $\beta = .20$ ,  $t = 2.28$ ,  $p < .05$ ), whereas for the Dutch this association was not significant ( $\beta = -.07$ ,  $t = .87$ ,  $p > .10$ ). Thus, a stronger endorsement of multiculturalism was related to a higher level of self-esteem for the ethnic minority participants, whereas for the Dutch, multiculturalism was not related to self-esteem.

Examining the main prediction, it turned out that the interaction between ethnic identification and multiculturalism was significant in the second step. The results of the simple slope analyses at high and low ethnic identification were .16 ( $p < .05$ ) and .03 ( $p > .10$ ). High ethnic identifiers who endorsed multiculturalism more strongly reported more positive self-esteem. For low identifiers there was no significant association between multiculturalism and self-esteem. This association was found for both the ethnic minority and the Dutch participants because in Step 3, the three-way interaction did not account for an additional percentage of the variance in self-esteem.

## 4.3. Discussion

The members of the ethnic minority groups were more likely to endorse multiculturalism than the members of the majority group. Furthermore, ethnic identification was positively related to self-esteem. The ethnic minority participants also indicated a stronger degree of in-group identification. Additionally, there was a positive association between the endorsement of multiculturalism and ethnic identification for the ethnic minority groups, whereas this association was negative for the Dutch participants. Ethnic identification had an independent positive effect on self-esteem. These results are in agreement with the findings of other studies conducted in the Netherlands (see Verkuyten, 2005). Furthermore, the positive association between ethnic identity and self-esteem is also in agreement with the literature (see Phinney, 1991; Verkuyten, 2005).

Study 1, however, goes beyond existing work in examining the self-esteem argument for multiculturalism. As predicted, stronger endorsement of multicultural recognition was positively related to self-esteem among the minority groups, whereas no association was found for the Dutch group. In addition, the results showed that participants with a high degree of ethnic identification and of endorsement of multiculturalism had relatively high self-esteem. Whereas for low group identifiers, their endorsement of multicultural recognition was not related to self-esteem. The interaction effect between multiculturalism and identification was found for both the ethnic minority and Dutch participants. This suggests that multicultural recognition provides a normative context in which both minority and majority people with high ethnic identification can feel good about themselves (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2004).

A second questionnaire study was conducted to examine whether these findings were reliable and if they could be generalized to another, somewhat older, sample and to other measures of self-esteem and multicultural recognition.

## 5. Study 2

### 5.1. Method

#### 5.1.1. Sample

Similar to Study 1 a questionnaire was used. There were 245 students: 141 described themselves as Dutch and 104 as a member of an ethnic minority group. Among this last group there were 64 Turkish–Dutch, and 40 Moroccan–Dutch and 91% of them was of

**Table 1**

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis with self-esteem as the dependent variable: standardized regression coefficients ( $\beta$ ) for Study 1.

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Ethnic group (Dutch)	.12	.13	.13
Ethnic identification	.22***	.17**	.18**
Multiculturalism	-.05	-.07	-.07
Ethnic group $\times$ multiculturalism		.24**	.24**
Ethnic identification $\times$ multiculturalism		.16**	.13
Ethnic group $\times$ identification $\times$ multiculturalism			.04
Multiple $r$	.29	.35	.35
$r$ -square change	.09	.036	.001
$F$ -Change	8.56***	5.46**	0.16

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

the second generation. Of the participants 50.6% were females and 49.4% were males. Participants were between 16 and 28 years of age and their mean age was 19.6. There were no gender and age differences between the ethnic minorities and the Dutch. Similar to Study 1, the students were asked to participate in a research on educational and social issues. All students approached were willing to participate.

### 5.1.2. Measures

Global self-esteem was assessed by means of the Single-Item Self-Esteem Scale (SISE) developed by Robins, Hendin, and Trzesniewski (2001). Apart from having face validity, Robins et al. (2001) report findings from four studies that support the reliability and validity of the SISE, also among ethnic minority groups (see also Robins, Tracy, & Trzesniewski, 2001; Robins, Trzesniewski, Tracy, Gosling, & Potter, 2002). In particular, they found strong convergence between the SISE and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) with correlations ranging from .74 to .80. In addition, both scales had nearly identical correlations with 37 different criteria, including academic outcomes and psychological and physical health. This convergence was also found for different ethnic groups. Their findings suggest that 'researchers using the SISE will find virtually the same relations as they would have had they used the RSES' (2001, p. 159). In addition, their studies indicate that the SISE is less affected by socially desirable responding than the RSES. Research among ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands has found a significant positive association between social desirable responding and the RSES-score (Verkuyten, 1994). Using a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (not very true of me) to 7 (very true of me), participants were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed with the statement 'I have high self-esteem'.

The endorsement of multicultural recognition was measured using six items taken from a Dutch version (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2003) of Berry and Kalin's (1995) Multicultural Ideology Scale. Studies using this Dutch version of the scale have found clear evidence for the measurement equivalence or factorial similarity of this scale across ethnic groups (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2003; Verkuyten & Brug, 2004). Hence, this version was used, three sample items being, 'Minorities in the Netherlands should be able to maintain their culture as much as possible', 'Every group has a right to its own culture', and 'People should always respect the culture of other groups'. The six items were measured on scales ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 7 (agree strongly). Cronbach's alpha was .88.

Ethnic identification was assessed with similar items to those used in Study 1. The participants responded to the six items using five-point scales. Cronbach's alpha was .81.

## 5.2. Results

### 5.2.1. Preliminary analysis

Again, there were no significant mean differences in ethnic identification, the endorsement of multiculturalism and self-esteem between the Turkish–Dutch and Moroccan–Dutch participants.

To examine mean differences in ethnic identification and the endorsement of multicultural recognition, these measures served as multiple dependent variables in an analysis of variance with ethnic group as a between-subjects factor. The multivariate effect of ethnic group was significant,  $F(2,242) = 143.56$ ,  $p < .001$ . Univariate analysis showed that this effect was significant for both measures ( $ps < .001$ ). Compared to the Dutch, and similar to Study 1, the minority group participants had a significantly higher score for ethnic identification (minorities,  $M = 5.62$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ , and the Dutch,  $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = .97$ ), and for the endorsement of multicultural recognition (minorities,  $M = 6.04$ ,  $SD = .66$ , and the Dutch,  $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ).

**Table 2**

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis with self-esteem as the dependent variable: standardized regression coefficients (beta) for Study 2.

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Ethnic group (Dutch)	.12	.06	.01
Ethnic identification	.24***	.20**	.03
Multiculturalism	–.08	–.14	–.21*
Ethnic group $\times$ multiculturalism		.29*	.19
Ethnic identification $\times$ multiculturalism		.09	–.14
Ethnic group $\times$ identification $\times$ multiculturalism			.38**
Multiple $r$	.28	.32	.35
$r$ -Square change	.079	.023	.023
$F$ -Change	6.19**	6.87***	3.08*

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Also similar to Study 1, there was a positive association between the endorsement of multiculturalism and ethnic identification for the ethnic minority group,  $r(104) = .37$ ,  $p < .001$ . No significant association between these two measures was found for the Dutch group,  $r(141) = -.08$ ,  $p > .10$ . The difference between the two correlations is significant,  $z = 3.44$ ,  $p < .01$ .

### 5.2.2. Self-esteem

Hierarchical regression analysis was, again, used to predict self-esteem. In the first step, ethnic group (0 = Dutch and 1 = ethnic minorities), the centered scores for ethnic identification, and the endorsement of multicultural recognition were entered. In the second step, the two interactions with multiculturalism were entered: ethnic group  $\times$  multiculturalism and ethnic identification  $\times$  multiculturalism. In Step 3, the three-way interaction between multiculturalism, ethnic group, and ethnic identification was entered into the equation. Table 2 shows the results.

The model in the first step explains 7.9% of the variance in self-esteem. Like in Study 1, there was no difference in self-esteem between the Dutch and the ethnic minority participants and multicultural recognition was not related to self-esteem. Furthermore, ethnic identification was a significant positive predictor of self-esteem.

The second step accounted for an additional 2.3% of the variance in self-esteem. There was a significant interaction effect between ethnic group and multicultural recognition. Separate regression analyses for the ethnic minorities and the Dutch showed that multiculturalism was positively associated with self-esteem for the former group ( $\beta = .24$ ,  $t = 2.22$ ,  $p < .03$ ). For the latter group this association was negative but not significant ( $\beta = -.15$ ,  $t = 1.88$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Thus, similar to Study 1 stronger endorsement of multicultural recognition was related to higher self-esteem for the ethnic minority participants, whereas for the Dutch multiculturalism was not related to self-esteem.

In contrast to Study 1, the third step in the regression analysis also accounted for a significant amount of the additional variance (2.3%) in self-esteem. The three-way interaction effect between multiculturalism, ethnic group, and ethnic identification was significant. To examine this interaction effect, simple slope analyses (Aiken & West, 1991) were performed on the responses of the minorities group and on those of the Dutch participants separately. For the ethnic minorities, the simple slopes at high and low ethnic identification were .31 ( $p < .05$ ) and  $-.22$  ( $p > .10$ ). As expected, the ethnic minority group participants that reported more positive self-esteem had a high level of ethnic identification and endorsed multiculturalism more strongly. There was no significant association between multiculturalism and self-esteem for low identifiers. For the Dutch participants, the association between multiculturalism and self-esteem was



not significant for high and for low ethnic identifiers (.22,  $p > .05$ , and  $-.09$ ,  $p > .10$ , respectively).

### 5.3. Discussion

Using a single-item measure of self-esteem and a different scale for multicultural recognition, the results of this second study are quite similar to those of the first one. They, again, indicate that, in general, members of ethnic minority groups (Turkish–Dutch and Moroccan–Dutch) are more likely to endorse multiculturalism than members of an ethnic majority group (the Dutch). Furthermore, members of the majority group indicated less in-group identification than the minority group members did. In addition, the endorsement of multicultural recognition was positively related to ethnic identification among the minority sample, whereas no association was found for the Dutch.

Evidence for the self-esteem argument for multiculturalism was found for the ethnic minority group participants. For them, the endorsement of multicultural recognition was positively related to self-esteem, whereas no association was found for the Dutch. The relationship for the minority group was qualified, however, by ethnic identification. That is, ethnic minority group participants with high ethnic identification who endorsed multiculturalism more strongly reported more positive self-esteem. For low identifiers no significant association between multiculturalism and self-esteem was found. This suggests that issues of group value and cultural recognition affect the self-esteem of those that already identify with and feel committed to their ethnic group.

The results of Studies 1 and 2 are generally supportive of the self-esteem argument for multiculturalism and in line with the predictions. However, the methodology of these studies leaves room for alternative explanations because only correlations were examined. The participants may have, for example, endorsed multiculturalism because they identified with their ethnic group, or self-esteem may have affected multicultural attitudes rather than vice versa. Thus, the results of these studies did not show that the ideology of multiculturalism in interaction with in-group identification actually affects self-esteem. A third, experimental, study was conducted to investigate the situational effects of multicultural recognition. Whereas the first two studies focused on the assessment of the endorsement of the importance of multicultural recognition, the third study examined the self-esteem effects of a temporary induced normative framework. Research on lay theories has shown that studies that experimentally activate theories provide similar findings as when the endorsement of lay theories are measured by self-report (e.g., Haslam & Ernst, 2002; Levy, West, Ramirez, & Karafantis, 2006; Plaks, Stroessner, Dweck, & Sherman, 2000). Thus, when multicultural recognition actually has an effect on self-feelings of high group identifiers, the results of Study 3 should be similar to those of the first two studies.

In Study 3, the influence of multicultural recognition on self-feelings was compared to that of a perspective which de-emphasizes the importance of ethnic categories. In contrast to multiculturalism, which fosters an appreciation of diversity by recognizing and respecting group identities and cultures, a color-blind perspective places the emphasis on disregarding ethnic categories. Color-blindness stresses that ethnic distinctions should be ignored in favor of considering and treating people as unique individuals. Color-blindness is not uncontested and has been shown to facilitate either social tolerance or intolerance depending on its intergroup meaning (Levy et al., 2005). Here I focus on the individualistic interpretation of color-blindness in which personal identity and the uniqueness of individuals is emphasized.

The color-blind focus on individual abilities, qualities, and achievements can have implications for self-feelings. Individualism has been found to be related to high self-esteem, both within and

between cultures (Twenge & Crocker, 2002). In their review, Oyserman, Coon, and Kimmelmeier (2002) found that individual differences in individualism correlate positively with self-esteem both in North America and Japan. In addition, Asians' self-esteem has been found to increase with greater exposure to North American individualistic culture (see Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999). The implication for the present study is that in the color-blind condition, ethnic identification should not be related to self-esteem. Group identities can be expected to not contribute to global self-feelings in a context where the focus is on individual differences and qualities. In such a context, the merit of one's ethnic group is not at stake: the uniqueness of individuals and individual differences are relevant rather than one's ethnic identity.

Thus, it was expected that in a context where people are encouraged to think in terms of multicultural recognition, ethnic identity would relate positively to self-feelings. Because the focus was on the positive aspects of multicultural recognition for all groups, these relationships were expected for both the majority (Dutch) and the minority group (Turkish–Dutch). In contrast, in the context where color-blindness is emphasized no association between ethnic identity and self-feelings was expected for both groups of participants.

## 6. Study 3

### 6.1. Method

#### 6.1.1. Sample

The study was conducted with 193 students. The sample consisted of 102 ethnically Turkish–Dutch and 91 ethnic Dutch participants. There were no Moroccan–Dutch students present in the setting where the study was conducted. The students were asked to participate in a research on 'Diversity in Dutch society'. All students were willing to participate. It took about 15–20 min to complete the anonymous questionnaire. There were 109 women and 94 men and the gender distribution was similar for both ethnic groups. The mean age was 18.58, and the ages ranged from 16 to 23. The Turkish–Dutch participants were born and raised in the Netherlands.

#### 6.1.2. Design and measures

An experimental between-subjects questionnaire study was carried out in which the frames used were: individualistic color-blindness and multicultural recognition. There were two different versions of the questionnaire, which were distributed randomly among the participants. One version focused on personal identity and individual uniqueness, and the another on multicultural recognition and the importance of cultural diversity for Dutch society. The experimental manipulations induced by the questionnaire were set up by following the procedure outlined by Wolsko and colleagues (2000). They experimentally manipulated color-blind versus multicultural ideology by providing participants with a one-page statement that endorsed either a color-blind or a multicultural approach to inter-ethnic relations. Subsequently, participants were asked to make a list of five reasons why color-blindness (or multiculturalism) is an adequate approach to group relations. They were then presented with a list of responses that, presumably, had been provided by previous participants, and were asked to circle the responses similar to their own. This procedure has been adopted in other studies (e.g., Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004), and is the one I used for this study. The multicultural experimental manipulation emphasized mutual recognition and the valuable contribution that all ethnic groups make to Dutch society. The individualistic color-blind manipulation stressed the importance of seeing people as unique individuals with distinctive personal identities. It can be noted that several discursive devices

were used to render the introductions plausible and acceptable, such as providing authoritative, scientific sources for the claims (see [Appendix A](#)). The participants were asked to read the one-page statement on the merit of the approach; to provide reasons why the approach was adequate; and to encircle similar responses in the other response lists.

Similar to Study 2, global self-feelings was assessed by means of the Single-Item Self-Esteem Scale ([Robins et al., 2001](#)).

Ethnic group identification was assessed by six items presented immediately after the participants indicated their ethnic group membership on the questionnaire. The items were similar as the ones used in the first two studies. Cronbach's alpha was .93.

Two additional measures were used for examining how the experimental manipulations were perceived. The first was meant to see whether both introductions were equally compelling ('message importance'). After reading and completing the introduction the participants in the multicultural condition were asked to indicate on a seven-point scale how important they consider it to be to acknowledge people as members of their cultural group. In the color-blind condition they were asked to indicate how important they consider it to be to acknowledge people as unique individuals. Second, both introductions might differ in terms of their hierarchy-attenuating message. In particular, multiculturalism, compared to color-blindness, could be seen as more threatening to the status and position of the majority group. We used three items (seven-point scales) to measure the perceived legitimacy of ethnic group relations in Dutch society (e.g., 'It is justified that the Dutch have higher status and prestige than the ethnic minorities'). These items have been used in a previous study ([Verkuyten & Reijerse, 2008](#)) and were taken from [Mummendey, Klink, Mielke, Wenzel, and Blanz \(1999\)](#). Alpha for these three items is .74 and a higher score indicates higher perceived legitimacy.

## 6.2. Results

### 6.2.1. Preliminary analyses

To examine the meaning of both introductions, an ANOVA was conducted with message importance as the dependent variable and experimental condition (color-blind and multiculturalism) and ethnic group (Turkish–Dutch and Dutch) as factors. There was a main effect for ethnic group,  $F(1,191) = 21.46$ ,  $p < .001$ . The Turkish–Dutch considered the messages more important than the Dutch participants. However, there was no main effect for condition and also not for the interaction between condition and ethnic group ( $ps > .10$ ).

In a second analysis of variance, I examined whether there were differences in perceived legitimacy. There was a main effect for ethnic group,  $F(1,191) = 27.77$ ,  $p < .001$  with the Dutch participants having a significantly higher score than the Turkish–Dutch. Perceived legitimacy did not differ, however, between the two experimental conditions and there was also no significant interaction effect between experimental condition and ethnic groups ( $ps > .10$ ).

To examine mean differences in ethnic identification, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted with experimental condition and ethnic group as factors. There was a main effect for ethnic group,  $F(1,191) = 67.81$ ,  $p < .001$ . The Turkish–Dutch group ( $M = 5.51$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ) indicated higher ethnic identification than the Dutch ( $M = 3.90$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ). The effect of the experimental condition was not significant. Thus, ethnic identification did not differ across the two conditions and this was found for both the Turkish–Dutch and the Dutch because there was no significant interaction effect between condition and ethnic group ( $ps > .10$ ).

### 6.2.2. Self-feelings

Considering the experimental design, differences in self-feelings were examined using the general linear model (GLM) univariate

procedure. Between-subjects analyses were conducted in which experimental condition and ethnic group were included as factors, and ethnic identification a continuous centered variable. Significant interaction effects were examined using simple slope analysis.

There was no significant difference in global self-feelings between the Dutch and the Turkish–Dutch participants and there was also no significant effect for experimental condition ( $ps > .10$ ). However, a significant main effect was found for ethnic identification,  $F(1,191) = 20.04$ ,  $p < .001$ . Identification was positively related to self-feelings.

It was hypothesized that within the multicultural condition, ethnic identification would be positively associated with self-feelings. The two-way interaction effect between condition and ethnic identification was indeed significant,  $F(1,191) = 5.23$ ,  $p < .05$ . As expected, simple slope analysis indicated that there was a positive and significant association between ethnic identification and global self-feelings in the multicultural condition ( $B = .37$ ,  $t = 4.84$ ,  $p < .001$ ), whereas there was no significant association in the color-blind condition ( $B = .10$ ,  $t = 1.31$ ,  $p > .10$ ). There was no significant three-way interaction effect which indicates that the findings are similar for the ethnic majority and minority group participants. The GLM procedure indicated that there were also no other significant (interaction) effects.

The self-feelings scores can also be compared across the two experimental conditions and for low and high identifiers (median split) separately. Low identifiers tend to have lower self-feelings in the multiculturalism condition ( $M = 5.19$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ) compared to the color-blindness condition ( $M = 5.70$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ) and this difference is significant,  $t(101) = 2.38$ ,  $p = .019$ . In contrast, high identifiers tend to have somewhat higher self-feelings in the multiculturalism ( $M = 6.01$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ) than in the color-blindness condition ( $M = 5.88$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ), but this difference is not significant ( $p > .10$ ).

## 6.3. Discussion

Study 3 provides additional experimental support for the self-esteem argument for multicultural recognition. When participants were encouraged to think in terms of multiculturalism, ethnic identification was positively associated with global self-feelings. This indicates that multiculturalism with its emphasis on recognition of ethnic groups and the acceptance of cultural diversity provides a context in which people with a strong ethnic identity can feel good about themselves. This positive effect was not only found for the Turkish–Dutch but also for the Dutch participants. Hence, the self-feelings of the majority group were also positively affected by an interpretation of multiculturalism that stresses the importance of cultural diversity and recognition for all groups in society, rather than for minority groups only. Evidence that the multiculturalism introduction was perceived in this way comes from the fact that participants in the two experimental conditions did not differ in their perceived 'message importance' and in the perceived legitimacy of inter-ethnic relations in Dutch society.

In the individualistic color-blind condition, ethnic identification was not associated with self-feelings. In this condition, the emphasis is on individual differences and personal identities rather than on the recognition and acceptance of ethnic group differences. In such a context, personal characteristics and not ethnic group identity is the relevant contingency to base one's global self-feelings upon. Research within and between cultures has found that individualism is related to high self-esteem (see [Oyserman et al., 2002](#); [Twenge & Crocker, 2002](#)). Thus, a social context that emphasizes individual differences and personal uniqueness seems to provide a favorable condition for positive self-feelings for both groups of participants and independently of group identification.

In contrast, a multicultural context provides a favorable condition for self-esteem for high group identifiers but not for low identifiers.

## 7. General discussion

The purpose of this research was to test the self-esteem argument for multiculturalism among ethnic minority and majority groups. According to Burnet (1995), the idea that acceptance and recognition of cultural diversity and cultural identities is crucial for self-feelings, is the multiculturalist assumption. Multicultural acceptance and recognition has been found to be important for psychological well-being and counseling (see Sue & Sue, 2003) and for the educational process (see Banks & Banks, 1995). The main reason is that positive multicultural interactions can result in a secure and strong ethnic identity that, in turn, is related to different outcomes, including high self-esteem (e.g., Berry et al., 2006; Seaton et al., 2006). However, most of this research has been conducted in North America and has not tested for causal relationships.

The main prediction was that multicultural recognition will be positively associated to global self-feelings of high ethnic group identifiers. The pattern of results for the three studies is quite consistent with this predicted interaction effect between multiculturalism and group identification. Participants with high ethnic identification who endorsed multicultural recognition more strongly reported more positive self-esteem, whereas multiculturalism was not related to the self-esteem for low identifiers. This result was found for the ethnic minority participants (Studies 1 and 2) and for the Dutch participants (Study 1). Moreover, the results of Study 3 showed that, for both the minority and the majority group, multicultural recognition had a positive effect on self-esteem for high group identifiers compared to low group identifiers. These results indicate that a multicultural recognition has favorable effects on self-esteem for those who have, for whatever reasons, a strong ethnic identity. Such an identity is likely to involve a general sensitivity and readiness to be concerned about the acceptance and recognition of cultural identities and the value of ethnic groups. Thus, for those who identify with and feel committed to their ethnic group, multiculturalism provides a favorable context to feel good about themselves. In such a context ethnic group identification can provide a valuable contingency to base one's self-esteem upon, as well as a sense of belonging and a feeling of meaningful existence that enhances positive self-feelings.

For the ethnic minority groups, the results of all three studies point in the same direction: for high group identifiers, multiculturalism appears to have a positive effect on self-esteem. This was found on the individual level in relation to individuals differences in the endorsement of multiculturalism (Studies 1 and 2), and on the contextual level in relation to ideological framing (Study 3). The similar findings for the two types of study is consistent with research on lay theories that has found that assessing these theories by self-report provide similar findings as temporarily inducing lay theories (e.g., Haslam & Ernst, 2002; Levy et al., 2006; Plaks et al., 2000).

However, for the Dutch the results of the studies differ somewhat. In Study 2 and for both low and high group identifiers, the endorsement of multiculturalism was not significantly associated with self-esteem. In the Netherlands, the discussion on multiculturalism has focused on the identity and position of ethnic minority groups (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2003; Van Oudenhoven, Prins, & Buunk, 1998). In Study 2, some of the items used to measure multiculturalism reflect this focus. In addition, the identity of the Dutch as the majority group is more self-evident or less threatened than that of the minority groups. However, the result for the ethnic minority and Dutch participants were similar in Studies 1

and 3. This suggests that multiculturalism has something to offer to both groups (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2004) and to high group identifiers in particular. It should be emphasized, however, that the current focus was on the positive aspects of multiculturalism. Participants were asked and encouraged to think about the importance of multicultural recognition which involves the appreciation of diversity and the importance of mutual acceptance of cultural identities for a harmonious society. It is important to note, however, that 'multicultural' and 'multiculturalism' are ubiquitous terms that are interpreted in various ways, including as a threat to the majority's way of life (Verkuyten, 2006). Hence, more research is needed to determine what the effects of these other interpretations are on self-feelings of majority group members.

The results of Study 3 show that self-esteem was not related to ethnic identification in the individualistic color-blind condition in which the emphasis was on individual differences and personal identities. Furthermore, it turned out that low identifiers tend to have lower self-feelings in the multiculturalism condition compared to the color-blindness condition. A color-blind approach with its focus on individual abilities, qualities and achievements seems to be a favorable social context for positive self-feelings. Hence, in terms of global self-esteem it can be argued that individualistic values should be emphasized and that ethnic group differences should be minimized (Twenge & Crocker, 2002). However, a strategy of individualistic color-blindness is difficult to reconcile with the continuing psychological and social importance of ethnic and cultural group differences in society. In many situations, people want to be seen and treated as individuals with a focus on their individual qualities and achievements and this is important for how they feel about themselves. But there are also many other situations in which people's ethnic identity is relevant and important and in which self-feelings depend on the acceptance and recognition of that identity. Ethnic identity and group status become relevant for self-feelings when the emphasis is on groups and group identities, as was the case in the multicultural condition. These results support the idea that it is important to take the (broader or momentary) normative and ideological context into account when examining the self-esteem of majority and minority group members (Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000).

To evaluate the present results and to give some suggestions for further studies, three points will be raised. First, in Study 3 situational effects of multiculturalism on self-feelings were examined by using an experimental design. This design presents an important addition to the correlational findings in Studies 1 and 2 but also raises questions of ecological validity. However, the results of Study 3 do not only support the findings of the first two studies but are also in agreement with what is found in research in the fields of acculturation, education and counseling. Furthermore, recent field studies have reported similar contextual findings. For example, using an event-contingent daily recording strategy, Downie, Mageau, Koestner, and Liodden (2006) found that people feel more positively about themselves in daily interactions in which one's heritage culture is being positively evaluated. Further, studying Chinese Americans, Yip (2005) found that the salience of ethnic identity fluctuates across daily situations and that ethnic salience bolstered positive self-feelings and reduced negative feelings (see also Yip & Fuligni, 2002). However, and in agreement with the present findings, these positive situational effects were only found for Chinese Americans who in general hold ethnicity as important to their self-concept.

Second, in this research I conceptualized ethnic group identification in terms of the value and the importance attached to one's ethnic background. These are two core aspects of group identification but there are others, such as attachment, sense of interdependence and behavioral involvement (e.g., Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, &



Chavous, 1998). Future research is needed to investigate whether these other components of ethnic identity affect the relationship between multicultural recognition and self-feelings in a similar or different way.

Third, in Studies 2 and 3 a single-item was used to measure global self-feelings. Although the results of these studies are in line with Study 1 in which the Rosenberg scale was used, the self-esteem argument for multiculturalism can be examined further by using other instruments and by focusing on different aspects of the self.

In conclusion, the present research has shown that multicultural recognition has a positive meaning for self-feelings of high in-group identifiers. Mutual recognition and acceptance of diversity appears to be favorable for self-feelings of ethnic minority and majority group members who value their ethnic identity. However, such a context can also have psychological costs for low group identifiers. For them, their ethnic group membership is not an important contingency to base their global self-feelings upon. The debate on the pros and cons of cultural diversity continues. The present research has tried to make a contribution to this debate by examining the self-esteem argument for multiculturalism. In evaluating the merits of multiculturalism, the empirical support for this argument should be assessed in relation to other possible (social) psychological outcomes and other approaches to deal with ethnic and cultural diversity.

## Appendix A

Introductory texts for the two experimental conditions in the two Studies (adapted from Wolsko, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2000).

### A.1. Multiculturalism

Sociologists, psychologists, economists and political scientists all agree that the relationship between different ethnic groups has not been very good lately. Social scientists, however, emphasize that the presence of different cultural groups (a multicultural society) can be very positive for the Netherlands. Different cultural groups bring their own view on life with them and, with that, also a richness in food, clothing, art, customs and economic activities. Every group can contribute to society in its own unique way. Research in countries like Canada and Australia has shown that an appreciation of diversity can lead to a dynamic and productive society in which different groups can complement and strengthen each other. Each group has its own talents and problems. By considering the strong as well as the weak points, we acknowledge the unique identity of every group and also the unique contribution they offer to Dutch society. So, social scientists emphasize that the acknowledgement and appreciation of cultural differences is an essential part of a harmonious and, above all, a strong and productive society: *cultural diversity is strength*.

### A.2. Color-blindness

Sociologists, psychologists, economists and political scientists all agree that the relationship between different ethnic groups has not been very good lately. Social scientists, however, emphasize that this is primarily because people think too much in-group terms. As a consequence of this, groups are set against each other. It is important to remember, however, that every person is a unique individual and is personally responsible for his or her own behavior. Various studies have shown that it is essential to think not in-group terms, but to approach each other as unique individuals. Each person is different and has his or her own qualities and talents. It is, therefore disap-

pointing when someone does not receive the opportunity to develop him- or herself, only because of the group to which the person belongs. This loss of individual qualities and talents is not only unjust, it also stands in the way of growing prosperity and is thus detrimental to society at large. So, social scientists encourage us to see and approach each person as an individual, regardless of the group to which he or she belongs, and not as a member of an ethnic group: *everyone is unique and different*.

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